



## BLENDED LEARNING: AN E-LEARNING PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION FOR POST COVID PERIOD



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**T**he progress of a nation depends upon its education system. However, the Indian education system faced a huge challenge posed by the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. In order to continue the education process in an uninterrupted way, online learning was adopted as the best and the only solution. Online learning has its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. As a part of imparting online education, several developments and investments are made in the education sector, which can be useful in the post COVID period. Blended mode of learning can adopt the advantages of both face-to-face teaching-learning and online teaching-learning. SWAYAM platform initiated by Government of India (GoI) can be considered as the best platform which offers an online course.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit every aspect of human life, be it the industrial sector, educational sector or agricultural sector, etc. The entire world is fighting against the COVID-19, which has been killing

thousands of people around the globe leading to shut down of schools, colleges, universities, and all educational institutions (Anwar & Adnan, 2020). At the same time, the educational process of students must have to continue. This creates the need of conducting teaching and learning process through online mode using e-learning and its tools (Marinoni et al., 2020) which increases the need and demand for e-learning, resulting in an increase in the number of students using online educational platforms and apps.

### Defining e-Learning

A learning system based on formalized teaching but with the help of electronic resources is known as e-learning. e-learning entails using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and learning systems to build and design learning experiences. e-Learning is the delivery of education and all activities relevant to instructing, teaching, and learning through various electronic media. The electronic

medium could be the Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite TV, video/audiotape, and/or CD ROM (Koo-hang & Harman, 2005). e-Learning needs to be understood in the broader context of using technology to meet society's needs for learning. It also requires us to understand that adult learners have psychological needs that e-learning must address. The Informing Science framework helps us understand that teaching in higher education involves a cast of roles that might best be performed by different specialists. e-Learning is often delivered using specialized software that assists teachers to create their courses, the student in using the coursework, and the administrator in making previously developed coursework available for re-use. It works hand-in-hand with learning objects and learning object repositories (Cohen & Nycz, 2006). A form of teaching and learning - which may represent a part or the whole of the education model in which it is used - that makes use of electronic media and devices to facilitate access, promote evolution and improve the quality of education and training (Sangrà et al., 2011). In short, e-learning refers to transferring knowledge and education by utilizing various electronic devices, and the concept can be better understood when is integrated into a context in which technology is used to meet people's need to learn and evolve

### **e-Learning Tools and Online Platforms**

e-Learning provides virtual learning worlds where learners can take part in active and creative learning with others through simulations, role-play, remote control of real-world tools and devices, online masterclasses, or collaboration with other education providers (Babu & Sridevi, 2018). There



are three types of e-learning tools: (i) curriculum tools, (ii) digital library tools, and (iii) knowledge representation tools. Each type of tool emphasizes different parts of the process. Curriculum tools provide a systematic and standard environment to support classroom learning; their functions are particularly helpful in the initiation and selection stages. Digital library tools facilitate effective and efficient access to resources to support exploration and collection while knowledge representation tools focus on formulation and representation (Oye et al., 2012). Educators and students should be provided suitable training to become efficient users of online educational apps that are widely used globally such as Voov, Zoom, Google classroom, Teams, etc. during the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic situation demands tech-savvy and highly skilled educators. Thus, educators should enhance their knowledge and skills that are required for the maximum usage of technological devices, e-learning tools, educational apps, and other online platforms like TV School, online portals, Google Meet, Slack, Zoom, Edu-page, etc. Different platforms used for online learning are Facebook, Twitter, Moodle, and Blackboard. The different pedagogical innovations for online learning are flipped learning, asynchronous learning, and blended learning (Heggart, Keith R.; Yoo, Joanne 2018). SWAYAM is another platform for online learning.

### **SWAYAM**

SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) is a program initiated by the Government of India and designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy viz., access, equity, and quality. SWAYAM platform is developed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and NPTEL, IIT Madras with the help of Google Inc. and Persistent Systems Ltd. The main objective of this effort is to provide the best teaching-learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged, through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). SWAYAM seeks to bridge the digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution and have not been able to join the mainstream of the knowledge economy. The courses are prepared by the best teachers in the country as an interactive mode and are available, free-of-cost to the residents in India. The SWAYAM platform covers school, undergraduate,



postgraduate, engineering, law, and other professional courses. The courses on SWAYAM are in 4 quadrants i.e., video lecture, specially prepared reading material that can be downloaded/printed, self-assessment tests through MCQs and quizzes, and an online discussion forum for clearing the doubts. Universities/colleges approving credit transfers for these courses can use the marks/certificate obtained in these courses for the same.

## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS OF E-LEARNING

### Strengths

e-Learning methods and processes are really strong. It is student-centered because e-learning methods provide the chance to customize our procedures and processes based on the needs of the learners and offer a great deal of flexibility in terms of time and location which helps us to maintain the educational process uninterrupted. The online tools available are important for an effective and efficient learning environment. Educators can use a combo of audio, videos, and text to reach out to their students in this time of crisis to maintain a human touch to their lectures which can

help in creating a collaborative and interactive learning environment where students can give their immediate feedback, ask queries, and learn interestingly (Dhawan, 2020). The “Anywhere Anytime” feature of e-learning is beneficial for teaching and learning in the time of natural disasters, and pandemics like COVID-19. The closure of places and unsafe traveling by roads can create a lot of troubles but e-learning will at least not keep us deprived of getting an education at our homes or workplaces. e-Learning facilities help everyone in getting an education at home or the workplace. e-Learning offers an alternative learning opportunity that is faster, cheaper, and potentially better. (Suresh et al., R. 2018).

### Weaknesses

e-Learning does not provide direct communication between the learner and the educator. Technical difficulties and the problem may hinder and restrict the teaching-learning process. Student's non-serious behavior in terms of time and flexibility can cause problems in the teaching-learning process. Individual differences of students are also affecting the e-learning process because all

students are not the same, as they vary in degrees of their capabilities and confidence level. Some do not feel comfortable while learning online, leading to increased frustration and confusion. Inadequate compatibility between the design of the technology and component of psychology required by the learning process; and inadequate customization of learning processes can obstruct the teaching process and creates an imbalance. Learners with low motivation or bad study habits may fall behind. Without a proper class, the students may get lost or confused about the course activities and deadlines. Students may feel isolated from the instructor and classmates. Instructors may not be available when students are studying or need help. Slow internet connections or older computers may make accessing course materials difficult (Yusuf & Al-Banawi, 2013).

### **Opportunities and Challenges in e-Learning**

e-Learning offers many opportunities in the field of education. It enhances the scope for innovation and digital developments. It also provides flexibility to the educational programs. Certain skills like problem-solving, critical thinking and adaptability can be developed and strengthened by using e-learning. e-Learning can offer to any person without considering the age. It provides a radical change in all aspects of education including pedagogy. Teachers can develop innovative pedagogical approaches in this panicky situation, now also termed as Panicgogy (Dhawan, 2020).

Online learning faces many challenges ranging from learners' issues, educators' issues, and content issues. It is a challenge for institutions to engage students and make them participate in the teaching-learning process. It is a challenge for teachers to move from offline mode to online mode, changing their teaching methodologies, and managing their time. There is a lack of standards for quality, quality control, development of e-resources, and e-content delivery. e-Learning demands a lot of time and cost. Ensuring digital equity is crucial in this tough time. Not all teachers and students have access to all digital devices, the internet, and Wi-Fi. Unavailability of proper digital tools, no internet connections, or iffy Wi-Fi connections can cause a lot of trouble due to which many

students might lose out on learning opportunities. Efforts should be taken by institutions to ensure that every student and faculty is having access to the required resources (Dhawan, 2020).

### **Overcoming the Challenges to e-Learning**

The challenges and disadvantages could be more prominent while the educational process takes place exclusively online. This may be due to the lack of teachers' experience in e-learning and due to the short time in which they had to adapt their teaching style to the new conditions. Relevant in this way are the results of a study conducted by School Education Gateway at the beginning of the pandemic which showed that 66.9% of respondents affirmed that they used online platforms for teaching for the first time. Thus, it can be inferred that students and teachers were not ready for an entirely online experience.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development mentioned that some of the challenges which the universities had to face were: keeping an equilibrium between online courses, which could affect students health, them spending many hours in front of a screen, and non-digital activities, analyzing and focusing on student's emotional health – providing them with support throughout the process of learning, taking into account the fact that not all students have access to the internet, and managing and monitoring their access to devices to effectively collaborate with them. Furthermore, universities also struggle with keeping the content of the course consistent and relevant, communicating clearly with the academic community, and also acquiring and recruiting students. A blended approach, where conventional teaching is combined with online teaching, should have ushered the learners to complete online learning (Aboagye et al., 2020).

### **Blended Learning**

Blended learning is an umbrella term for several different models of learning that combine—or “blend”—either traditional or technology-enriched classrooms with online instruction. Blended learning is formal education in which students learn at least in parts through online learning with some element of control over time place, path, and/or

pace. Here, students learn at least in parts at a supervised brick and mortar located away from home, and modalities along each students learning path within the course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience (Christensen et al., 2013).

### Elements of Blended Learning

Different elements of blended learning are time, pace, path, place, and teacher of record. The different learning models use these elements in different combinations. The teaching-learning spectrum varies from completely offline traditional method to completely online method. Blended learning utilizes the advantage of both the above two methods.

### Blended Learning Models

The literature suggests four discrete models of blended learning in practice - Rotation Model, Flex Model, A La Carte Model, Enriched-Virtual Model. In the Rotation model, students rotate between learning paths or "modalities" such as Station Rotation, Lab Rotation, Flipped Classroom—one of which is online learning—either on a fixed schedule or at the teacher's discretion. The flex model is fluid instead of fixed, allowing for real-time changes in schedules to meet ever-changing student learning needs. The a la carte model – also known as the "self blend" model – allows students to design their educational experience by selecting specific online courses to supplement their traditional in-school coursework. In the Enriched-Virtual model, students learn primarily online but split their time between the brick-and-mortar school campus and an off-site environment (Beaver et al., 2014).

### Benefits of Blended Learning

The advantages of blended learning for students include increased learning skills, greater access to information, improved satisfaction and learning outcomes, and opportunities both to learn with others and to teach others. Recent research identifies the following key benefits of blended learning:

1. Opportunity for collaboration at a distance
2. Increased flexibility: Technology-enabled learn-

ing allows for learning anytime and anywhere, letting students learn without the barriers of time and location but with the possible support of in-person engagement.

3. Blended learning offers a platform to facilitate greater interactivity between students, as well as between students and teachers.

4. Additional types of learning activities improve engagement and can help students achieve higher and more meaningful levels of learning.

5. Learners practice the ability to project themselves socially and academically in an online community of inquiry. Digital learning skills are becoming essential to be a lifelong learner, and blended courses help learners master the skills for using a variety of technologies (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018).



### Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the biggest crises faced by education systems and humanity in the recent past. The education process was interrupted due to the closure of schools and the children are educated from home. These closures across countries affect more than 90% of the student population in the world (Aytaç, T 2021). Online learning is the best possible alternative to conventional face-to-face learning to avoid the further spreading of COVID-19. The whole world is expecting a day that is free from COVID-19. The education system will get a new face in the post-COVID period by utilizing the facilities that played a major part in the pandemic. Therefore, blended learning can overcome the shortcoming of online learning and, at the same time it can use its advantages. ★